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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2017

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SUBJECT: JORDAN VALLEY SETTLER: ANNAPOLIS "IRRELEVANT"

REF: TEL AVIV 04994

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Tom Duffy, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Jordan Valley Regional Council chairman Dubi Tal told PolOffs 20 November that economics are the key to peace, and Israelis and Palestinians are only in the Jordan Valley "to make money." He did not press his previous claim (reftel) that GOI control of the Jordan Valley is crucial for Israeli security, but told PolOffs that peaceful evacuation of Jordan Valley settlements would be possible in exchange for real peace. END SUMMARY.

Money making

¶2. (C) PolOffs met November 20 with Jordan Valley Regional Council Chairman Dubi Tal, the charismatic leader of 4,000 agrarian settlers in 21 settlements stretched over 82km along the Jordan River. These settlers occupy thirty percent of the West Bank and produce ten percent of Israel's total agricultural exports (dates, spices, grapes), valued at USD 120 million annually. Tal moved to the area in 1976 with the offer of a free home from the GOI, but said the GOI no longer provides such incentives to Jordan Valley settlers.

¶3. (C) Jordan Valley settlers are religious and secular and, according to Tal, share a goal of making money. Tal has previously emphasized to Post his constituency's strategic importance to Israel's security, but said November 20 that the Jordan Valley is important strategically, but he "doesn't personally care" about the land itself and "if we're told to go, we'll go... we won't resist like Gush Katif." He said he would consider living as a non-Palestinian in a Palestinian state, as long as the Jordan Valley remains lucrative. A successful economy, he said, is the prerequisite for stability.

¶4. (C) Tal said as Regional Council Chairman, he issues building permits for construction in existing settlements, and the Israeli MOD must issue building permits for any new settlements. He noted that recently the MOD has been slow to issue such permits.

Palestinians "pleased"

¶5. (C) Tal said Jordan Valley settlers employ up to 7,000 Palestinians during harvests, and he believes these seasonal laborers want to maintain the status quo, including IDF checkpoints near Nablus, Jenin, and Tubas, because they are earning money and do not want an influx of job seekers or trouble makers. He said local Palestinians are "pleased" that settlers cultivate the land and many followed the settlers to the area. He confirmed that there are currently minimal

security problems or IDF presence in the Jordan Valley, noting that past security incidents were the work of outsiders, not local Palestinians.

Quiet, not peace

16. (C) Tal was not panicked or angry unlike many settlers PolOffs have met just before Annapolis. He was relaxed and displayed a combination of cynicism and optimism. He said, "Peace is only an illusion because nobody - neither Israelis or Palestinians - want it, preferring quiet instead." He dismissed Annapolis as a distant exercise and said "diplomats having cocktails in Annapolis" is irrelevant to Jordan Valley settlers.
DUFFY